



Setting the Table

1. A Highly Vulnerable Population *Vulnerable = in need of special care and attention*

“Vulnerable doesn’t mean weak - it means that for some reason that person is bearing extra weight on their shoulders.”

Examples of vulnerability in gender and sexual minority youth:

- 82% of bisexual and non-binary youth say they feel unhappy most of the time.
- 65% of LGBTQ youth struggle with mental health challenges like depression, anxiety or disordered eating.
- 40% of trans youth report being harassed or assaulted because of their gender expression.
- And the amount of LGBTQ youth that carry suicidal feelings is 10-14 times higher than the general youth population

(https://mcs.bc.ca/pdf/not_yet_equal_sequel.pdf)

2. A Government Mandate

Bill C-4 = a federal bill that amends Canada's Criminal Code by creating new criminal offences related to intentional practices, treatment or services related to conversion therapy. It does not criminalize conversations in which a person expresses an opinion on sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, unless that conversation forms part of an formalized intervention designed to make a person heterosexual or cisgender. <https://www.justice.gc.ca>

Bill C-4:

- Doesn’t stop us from having conversations that explain what our faith tradition says about gender and sexuality.
- Doesn’t prohibit us from answering questions, exploring the meaning of identity, or even sharing about what we’ve personally discovered as we have journeyed to understand gender and sexuality.

... **as long as** those conversations aren’t intentionally designed to push a youth toward changing or repressing their behaviour or beliefs around their gender or sexuality.

“ When we trust that the Holy Spirit is actually fully engaged in doing his work, we are freed from carrying the weight of convincing or convicting ... freed to interact with others out of our identity as ones who are loved not because of what we have done but because of what God has done.”

Express Care

More information about the following 5 elements of the Developmental Relationship Framework can be found at searchinstitute.org.

"God doesn't express his care as a reward for those who agree - it's extravagantly given for all, without reservation. God's love cost something and God gave it freely - even in the middle of our messiness."

How does it look?

1. Be dependable
2. Listen
3. Believe in me
4. Be warm
5. Encourage me

Invite Growth

"Discovery is usually less about delivering instruction or pre-packaged answers and more about time spent with a gracious person who lovingly asks good questions. Simply telling a youth what to do or think might feel like the shorter route, but that's a pathway to compliance not to personal and spiritual growth."

1. Invite me toward God's vision for me - not yours.

Take time to prayerfully think about this:

- What does God see in this youth?
- Where are they showing that they were made in the image of God - even if they don't know him yet?
- What good things has God prepared in advance for them to do and how is God equipping them for that?

2. Give me opportunities to expand my view of myself.

3. Invite me into conversations about faith.

Provide Support

Research has repeatedly shown that the more non-accepting behaviors present in family and faith communities, the greater risk of severe mental health challenges in LGBTQ+ youth. For more information see www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/the-trauma-focused-cbt-and-family-acceptance-project , <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/faith-communities-and-the-well-being-of-lgbtq-youth> and search "Faith Communities and the Well-being of LGBTQ Youth" PDF Download.

Watch for these harmful non-accepting behaviors in your ministry:

- Avoiding conversation about the youth's LGBTQ identity
- Telling the youth that this is just a phase
- Blaming the youth when others mistreat them because of their gender expression

- Letting others speak badly about gender and sexual minorities in front of your youth
- Telling the youth that God will punish them because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

When a youth “comes out” to you:

- Thank the youth for trusting you.
- Find out about their journey to this point as well as their hopes and fears for the future.
- Clarify what this declaration means to them and what they would like to see change as a result of it.
- Ask about their support system.
- Talk about who else they plan to tell and how they plan to do it.

Share Power

“It is simply wrong to use your emotional connection to a youth as a way of pushing them toward adopting your beliefs. 1 John 4:19 says: “We love because he first loved us” - not “we love so that people will change.”

How does Sharing Power look?

1. Respect me—Take me seriously and treat me fairly.
2. Include me—Involve me in decisions that affect me.
3. Invite me to collaborate—Work with me to solve problems and reach goals.
4. Let me lead—Create opportunities for me to take action and lead.

Expand Possibilities

“A relationship with a caring adult can tip the scales from risk to resilience for a youth, but research has also shown that connecting youth to multiple supportive relationships actually creates more resilience!”

1. Recognize the size of the challenge
2. Be honest about the continuum of positions in the church
3. Build bridges to people, not just programs
4. Invite youth into the possibilities of prayer